Christ Misunderstood: How the Modern Church Repeats the Old Covenant

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In a time when churches around the world profess unwavering devotion to Jesus Christ, a troubling pattern has emerged: many continue to build their theology, worship, and cultural engagement on Old Covenant frameworks that Christ explicitly fulfilled or overturned. From the resurgence of legalism to the justification of war, from prophetic speculation to the rebuilding of temple-centered religion, the modern church often finds itself drifting back into the shadows of a covenant that was never meant to last. This paper explores the central misunderstanding at the heart of this crisis: the failure to recognize the person of Jesus not merely as a contributor to the biblical tradition, but as its fulfillment and culmination. By tracing how common theological errors—especially those rooted in misreadings of the Old Testament—undermine the radical message of the Gospel, we call the church back to its true foundation. This is not a plea for doctrinal minimalism or cultural retreat, but a call for reformation—one that centers entirely on the teachings, ethic, and kingdom of the risen Christ.

Keywords: Jesus, fulfillment, Old Covenant, New Covenant, legalism, prophecy, just war, temple, nationalism, Sermon on the Mount, grace, reconciliation, church reform, kingdom of God, Mosaic law, Christ-centered, dispensationalism, enmity, peace, spiritual misinterpretation. A collaboration with GPT-4o. CC4.0.

1. Introduction: A Church at Odds with Its Own Center

The modern Christian church frequently professes loyalty to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. His name is exalted in liturgy, sermon, song, and prayer. His crucifixion and resurrection are rightly held as the central events in human history. Yet despite this reverence, many churches continue to interpret Scripture—and structure their theology—in ways that effectively sideline or dilute what Jesus actually taught and fulfilled. They honor Him in name, but in practice, they often construct their doctrines and ethics from the frameworks of the Old Testament, as though He had never completed the work of fulfillment He proclaimed in the Gospels.

Nowhere is this contradiction more evident than in the way the church handles topics such as divine law, warfare, prophecy, judgment, and national identity. These themes, which had defined Israel's covenantal life under the Mosaic law, are frequently reasserted in Christian teaching without adequate reference to Christ's radical reinterpretation—or outright replacement—of them. As a result, a kind of covenantal confusion takes root. Churches cite Deuteronomy for moral law, Joshua for just war, and Kings for divine leadership, all while preaching the name of a Savior who told His followers to love enemies, turn the other cheek, and renounce political power altogether.

This inconsistency is not a minor interpretive error; it is a misalignment with the very foundation of the New Covenant. It is possible—indeed, common—for Christians to uphold biblical texts while simultaneously misrepresenting the Gospel by placing Old Testament paradigms alongside or even above the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The church thereby becomes unmoored from the transformative, kingdom-centered message of Jesus and drifts toward moralism, nationalism, legalism, and fear-based religion—all of which He came to overcome.

The thesis of this paper is simple but urgent: the modern church often misunderstands its covenantal foundation by re-emphasizing elements of the Old Testament that Jesus explicitly fulfilled, transcended, or rejected. In doing so, it

risks rendering the Cross and Resurrection practically irrelevant to its theology and witness.

The purpose of what follows is not to attack the Old Testament, nor to diminish its importance in salvation history. Rather, it is to clarify what Christ meant when He said, *"I have not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it,"* and to ask why so many churches still live—and preach—as if that fulfillment never occurred. By exposing specific theological misunderstandings and returning to the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, this paper seeks to reframe the church's compass, orienting it again not around shadows, but around the substance: Christ Himself.

2. The Shadow and the Fulfillment: Understanding the Old and New Covenants

To understand the root of the modern church's confusion, we must return to the essential distinction between the Old and New Covenants. This is not merely a matter of chronological development or stylistic difference—it is a matter of theological transformation. Scripture itself teaches that the relationship between the two covenants is not one of simple continuation, but of shadow and fulfillment.

The Apostle Paul writes in Colossians 2:17, *"These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."* Similarly, the author of Hebrews begins chapter 10 by stating, *"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves."* These verses make an important claim: the commandments, rituals, festivals, sacrifices, and institutions of the Old Testament were not ends in themselves, but anticipatory signs—preliminary outlines of something greater, namely, the person and work of Jesus Christ.

This does not mean the Old Testament is false or obsolete. On the contrary, its value is precisely in its prophetic nature. But to treat it as the final word, or to place it on equal footing with the revelation of Christ, is to misunderstand its purpose. It would be like admiring the scaffolding of a building long after the structure has been completed, or clutching a map while ignoring the arrival at the destination.

Jesus Himself spoke directly to this transition. In Matthew 5:17, He declared, *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."* The key word here is "fulfill". Jesus does not erase the Old Testament; He completes it. The Law, which once mediated Israel's covenantal identity, now finds its perfect embodiment and purpose in Him. As John 1:17 succinctly puts it, *"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."*

This transition from shadow to substance is also evident in the way Jesus exercises unique interpretive and divine authority. In the Sermon on the Mount, He repeatedly contrasts the Mosaic Law with His own words: *"You have heard that it was said… but I say to you."* (Matthew 5). This is not mere commentary or rabbinical clarification; this is a direct claim of divine authority. Jesus is not simply explaining the Law—He is replacing its external prescriptions with a new internal ethic grounded in grace, humility, and the transformation of the heart.

Paul reinforces this point in Galatians 3:24–25, writing, *"The law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian."* Here, the Law is depicted as a temporary guide—essential in its time, but ultimately superseded by the arrival of Christ. The image is that of a tutor or custodian, needed for a season but no longer in charge once maturity has been reached.

Thus, the New Covenant is not a rebranded version of the Old—it is its culmination and transformation. In the New Covenant:

- The Law becomes written not on tablets of stone but on hearts (Jeremiah 31:33).
- The Temple is no longer a building but the Body of Christ (John 2:19–21).
- Sacrifice is no longer continual, but once-for-all (Hebrews 10:10).
- Identity is no longer tribal, but spiritual (Romans 2:28–29).

Yet despite this clarity in Scripture, many modern churches continue to relate to the Old Testament as if Christ never fulfilled it. They preach the ethics of Moses as

binding, defend violence with reference to Joshua, and define community boundaries based on genealogical or national lines rather than spiritual rebirth in Christ.

Until this fundamental misunderstanding is addressed, the church will continue to operate in the tension of professing Christ while practicing Moses—unaware that the shadow was never meant to compete with the Light.

3. Misunderstanding #1: The Resurgence of Legalism

One of the most pervasive misunderstandings in the modern church is the quiet, often well-intentioned resurgence of legalism—the belief that right standing with God depends on one's ability to follow moral rules and uphold behavioral codes. This mindset does not usually appear under that name. It hides beneath the language of "holiness," "biblical standards," or "obedient living," and often appeals to Scripture to justify its authority. Yet at its root, legalism displaces the Gospel of grace and reverts the church back to a covenantal posture that Christ fulfilled and superseded.

This legalism typically manifests as moralism—a form of Christianity that centers not on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but on good behavior. The emphasis shifts from *"Come, follow Me"* to *"Be a good person."* The radical, inwardly transformative grace of God is replaced by external conformity to visible norms. Whether these norms concern sexuality, dress, speech, or Sabbath observance, the result is the same: the Christian life is defined by compliance, not communion.

A telling sign of this error is found in the content of sermons and teachings across many churches today. While Jesus' own teachings—especially those in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)—offer a radical vision of heart-transformed discipleship, many pulpits focus instead on the legal code of the Old Testament, particularly the Ten Commandments or Levitical purity laws. These laws, while once vital to Israel's covenantal identity, were always provisional and preparatory. To treat them as binding today is to misunderstand the nature of Christ's

fulfillment and to ignore His direct teaching, which consistently moved beyond external obedience to address internal motives, thoughts, and desires.

This confusion leads to an even deeper theological problem: the blurring of the line between obedience to Christ and adherence to Mosaic law. Obedience to Christ does not mean returning to Sinai; it means walking in the Spirit, rooted in grace, love, and truth. The commands of Christ—such as forgiving enemies, renouncing retaliation, and giving without expecting return—are not mere upgrades to the Mosaic law; they are evidence of a new covenantal reality. The Mosaic framework relied on boundaries, external markers, and punishments. Christ's framework depends on transformed hearts, empowered not by fear but by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

When churches fail to make this distinction, the consequences are profound.

First, self-righteousness creeps in. Those who believe they are keeping the rules begin to feel spiritually superior, often comparing themselves to others who fall short. Grace becomes unnecessary for the righteous, and burdensome for the sinner.

Second, fear-based discipleship takes hold. Believers live in constant anxiety about whether they are "good enough," unsure if God's love depends on their performance. Assurance of salvation becomes elusive. The freedom offered in Christ is replaced by a treadmill of spiritual effort.

Third, and perhaps most tragically, the church becomes exclusionary. Instead of being a community of grace welcoming the broken and the seeking, it becomes a gated community for the morally acceptable. Sinners are not drawn in by mercy—they are kept at a distance by judgment.

This is not what Jesus envisioned. His harshest critiques were aimed at those who "tied up heavy burdens" and laid them on others, while neglecting the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness (Matthew 23:4, 23). He invited the weary and burdened to come to Him—not for more rules, but for rest (Matthew 11:28–30).

In a world already fractured by shame and striving, the church must not resurrect the Law that Christ fulfilled. It must proclaim the freedom of the Gospel: that righteousness is not earned but received, that holiness is not imposed but formed by grace, and that salvation is not a ladder of performance but a gift of mercy. Anything less is not Christianity—it is merely religious moralism under another name.

4. Misunderstanding #2: Justifying War and Nationalism through Old Testament Lenses

Another significant misunderstanding in the modern church arises from the uncritical use of the Old Testament—particularly the books of Joshua, Judges, and Kings—to frame or justify warfare and nationalism. In many pulpits, political discourse, and theological circles, stories of ancient Israel's conquest and defense are employed as if they carry direct ethical and spiritual endorsement for modern violence, national superiority, or militaristic theology. This is a grievous misuse of Scripture, rooted in a failure to understand the radical shift that took place in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament presents a historical and covenantal account of how God worked through a specific nation—Israel—to establish His purposes in a particular time. This included battles, divine judgment on wicked nations, and at times, territorial conquest under divine command. Yet these actions occurred under a theocratic covenant—a temporary, shadow covenant that was meant to prepare the way for something greater (Hebrews 8:5–13). When Christ came, He fulfilled the covenant, disarmed the logic of violence, and inaugurated a kingdom not of this world (John 18:36). To return to the Old Testament model for contemporary geopolitical guidance is to reverse the trajectory of redemptive history.

Despite this, some modern churches and Christian movements continue to draw heavily from Old Testament warfare narratives as paradigms for current events. They interpret political conflicts, especially in the Middle East or in culture wars at home, through the lens of Israel’s conquest of Canaan or David’s military victories.

“Spiritual warfare” language often bleeds into physical and political domains, making it difficult to separate biblical metaphor from nationalistic ideology. In these frameworks, opponents become enemies of God, and violence becomes holy if framed as defensive or divinely sanctioned.

The problem is not simply that this is a bad reading of the Old Testament—it is that it directly contradicts the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus teach a doctrine of “Just War.” He never authorizes His followers to take up arms in defense of truth, justice, or kingdom. On the contrary, He repeatedly rejects the logic of violence:

- *“Blessed are the peacemakers…”* (Matthew 5:9)
- *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”* (Matthew 5:44)
- *“Put your sword back in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.”* (Matthew 26:52)
- *“My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight…”* (John 18:36)

These are not metaphorical statements. Jesus spoke them in response to real violence and real threats. He deliberately refused to align His mission with political resistance movements such as the Zealots, and He subverted all messianic expectations of a conquering king. His triumph would come not through military victory, but through suffering, sacrifice, and resurrection.

Closely tied to this militarism is a misuse of Israel’s tribal identity. Some Christians view modern nations—particularly their own—as heirs to the promises and military mandate once given to ancient Israel. Others elevate the modern nation-state of Israel to near-sacred status, believing that its political actions bear divine endorsement by virtue of historical continuity. Still others apply Old Testament “chosen people” theology to justify ethnocentrism or racial exclusion within the church itself.

But under the New Covenant, national and ethnic identities are no longer covenantal categories. Paul makes this explicit:

- *"There is neither Jew nor Greek... for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Galatians 3:28)
- *"He has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier..."* (Ephesians 2:14)

To claim divine preference for a nation, race, or political state is to deny the universal scope of Christ's kingdom—a kingdom founded not on land or law, but on grace, truth, and the indwelling Spirit.

In short, the life of Jesus invalidates the use of Old Testament frameworks for modern justifications of war and nationalism. His kingdom is not of this world. His people are not defined by bloodline or boundary. His ethic does not permit vengeance, domination, or conquest. And His mission—to reconcile the world to God through love—cannot be carried out with the weapons of the world.

The modern church must choose. It can cling to Joshua's sword and David's throne—or it can follow the crucified King who told Peter to put his sword away. It cannot do both.

5. Misunderstanding #3: Rebuilding the Temple in Theology and Culture

One of the subtler but deeply significant misunderstandings in the modern church is its tendency to rebuild the temple—if not in stone, then in spirit and structure. This occurs not through malice or overt rebellion, but through a misplaced reverence for religious systems that Jesus explicitly fulfilled and replaced. In both theology and culture, the church has shown a fascination with the physical temple, the priesthood, sacrificial systems, and ritual structures, often without realizing that these were shadows meant to prepare the way for the reality found in Christ.

In various strands of Christian eschatology—especially those influenced by dispensationalism—there is a preoccupation with the physical rebuilding of the

Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Entire theological systems speculate about the restoration of animal sacrifice and temple rituals as if such a development would represent divine progress. Some see the temple's reconstruction as a necessary precursor to the return of Christ. But such views run directly counter to the New Testament's declaration that Jesus Himself is now the true and eternal temple.

In John 2:19, Jesus makes a stunning claim:

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."
John clarifies that He was speaking of His body. In doing so, Jesus redefines the entire concept of sacred space. The temple was no longer a building in Jerusalem but the very person of Christ—the new meeting place between God and humanity. The writer of Hebrews develops this idea with theological precision. In Hebrews 9–10, we are told that Jesus, as both High Priest and sacrifice, entered the true heavenly sanctuary "once for all," rendering the old system obsolete:
"We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10)
"Where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary." (Hebrews 10:18)

Yet despite this clarity, the modern church often behaves as if the veil had never been torn. There is a persistent obsession with ritual, religious architecture, and performative holiness, which mirrors the temple-based system Jesus fulfilled. Cathedrals become sanctuaries of reverence not because of God's indwelling presence, but because of their grandeur. Church services are choreographed with a focus on ceremonial exactitude. Priestly roles—though perhaps renamed as pastors or elders—are invested with excessive authority and spiritual distance. Sacraments become gates to grace rather than expressions of it. In these ways, churches subtly rebuild what Christ tore down.

The Apostle Paul insisted that the temple now is the body of Christ—not a building, but a people.

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Corinthians 3:16)

This radical teaching undermines any system that seeks to isolate God to a place, priesthood, or ritual. The sacred is no longer confined to the holy of holies—it is poured out into the lives of believers through the Spirit of Christ. The presence of God is now mobile, embodied, and collective.

But when churches elevate structure over substance, form over Spirit, and tradition over transformation, they effectively return to a pre-Christ religious framework. They treat Christ not as the fulfillment of the temple, but as an addition to it—an error both theological and practical. They maintain boundaries between sacred and secular, clergy and laity, altar and pew, as if the curtain had not been torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51).

The consequences of this misunderstanding are far-reaching. Instead of nurturing discipleship rooted in lived faith, churches begin to emphasize attendance, participation in ritual, or allegiance to institutional norms. Spiritual maturity is measured by conformity to ceremonial patterns rather than depth of communion with Christ. The Christian life becomes passive, transactional, and compartmentalized.

To rebuild the temple in theology or culture is to reject the very heart of the Gospel, which declares that in Christ, God has come to dwell not in buildings made by human hands, but in human hearts remade by grace.

The true church does not await a third temple in Jerusalem, nor does it sanctify its sanctuaries with smoke and stone. It proclaims that the temple has already come, has already died, and has already risen—and now lives within us.

6. Misunderstanding #4: Prophecy Obsession Without Christ-Centered Discernment

Among the most widespread and consequential errors in the modern church is its obsession with prophecy—especially end-times prophecy—devoid of Christ-centered discernment. This fixation manifests in countless sermons, best-selling books, online ministries, and global conferences. While biblical prophecy is a vital and valid component of God's revelation, the failure to interpret it through the

lens of Jesus Christ has led many believers into confusion, fear, and theological distortion.

At the heart of this problem is a misreading of Old Testament prophecy without recognizing Christ as the interpretive key. The Law and the Prophets were never meant to stand alone; they were designed to point forward to the Messiah. Jesus makes this clear in Luke 24:27:

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

Despite this, many modern interpretations of prophecy attempt to extract meaning from texts like Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah while bypassing the New Testament altogether—or treating Christ's fulfillment as merely a pause in Israel's prophetic timeline. The result is an interpretive method that treats Israel as a permanent national-theological center, instead of seeing Christ as the fulfillment and embodiment of what Israel was called to be.

This distortion is most evident in dispensationalist theology, a 19th-century framework that divides history into distinct "dispensations" or periods of divine interaction. According to this view, the Church is a temporary interruption in God's plan for ethnic Israel, and biblical prophecy will resume its "true" course when the Church is raptured out of the world. In practice, this often leads to the elevation of geopolitical Israel over the universal Body of Christ. Political events in the Middle East are treated as signs of God's special favor or judgment, while the Church—the spiritual Israel composed of Jews and Gentiles in Christ—is sidelined or fragmented.

This elevation of national Israel above the Church has serious implications. It promotes a tribal theology, in which God's purposes are imagined to unfold primarily through an ethnic nation-state, rather than through the inclusive and global kingdom Christ established. It also justifies uncritical political alliances, overlooks injustices, and discourages the Church from embracing its present identity as the temple and body of Christ on Earth.

Closely related to this is the elevation of future speculation over present obedience to Jesus. Countless believers are more familiar with speculative timelines, prophetic codes, and eschatological charts than they are with the Sermon on the Mount. Entire ministries are devoted to decoding headlines and matching them with verses in Revelation or Daniel, often with failed predictions and shifting narratives that nonetheless retain a devoted following. In this environment, discipleship is postponed, ethical responsibility is diluted, and hope becomes fragile—dependent on world events instead of the finished work of Christ.

The cost of this prophecy obsession is profound:

- Distraction: Churches become more focused on decoding future events than embodying Christ in the present.
- Anxiety: Believers live in a constant state of fear about wars, disasters, or political changes, misreading them as signs of divine wrath.
- Tribalism: The gospel becomes exclusive and nationalized, undermining Christ's call to make disciples of all nations.
- False hope: Instead of anchoring hope in the person of Jesus, it becomes tethered to political outcomes, rebuilding of temples, or deliverance from suffering.

Jesus warned His followers against being consumed with dates and speculation:

"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." (Acts 1:7)

Instead, He commissioned them to be His witnesses—to embody His teaching, proclaim His kingdom, and live in hopeful readiness. That commission remains unchanged.

Prophecy, when rightly understood, should draw us deeper into Christ, not away from Him. It should magnify His sovereignty, not our fears; His kingdom, not our nations; His return, not our predictions.

To reclaim prophecy as part of Christian faith, the church must recenter it on the person of Jesus, who is both the "yes" to all God's promises (2 Corinthians 1:20) and the end of the story Himself—Alpha and Omega, not appendix or interruption.

7. Misunderstanding #5: Misusing the Concept of Enemies

One of the most spiritually dangerous errors in the modern church is the continued misuse of the concept of "enemies", drawn from the Old Testament but divorced from the radical transformation introduced by Christ. Instead of seeing the Cross as the definitive end of enmity, many churches continue to frame the world through adversarial lenses—spiritualizing the enemies of ancient Israel, demonizing ideological opponents, and waging culture wars in the name of God. This distortion not only contradicts the Gospel—it blinds the church to the mission of reconciliation that Christ entrusted to it.

In the Old Testament, the concept of "enemy" was tightly woven into Israel's national identity and survival. Hostile neighboring tribes such as Amalek, Philistia, Moab, and Babylon represented physical threats to the covenant people. God at times commanded Israel to resist or destroy such nations, as in Exodus 17 where Amalek attacked Israel and was marked for perpetual opposition:

"The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." (Exodus 17:16)

That historical context, however, has too often been spiritualized and misappropriated by modern Christians, who apply such ancient animosities to contemporary individuals, ideologies, or cultures. Instead of interpreting Christ as the end of tribal vengeance, many preachers and teachers now use the figure of Amalek as a metaphor for personal or national enemies—branding political opponents, secular institutions, or even fellow Christians with differing views as the equivalent of divine adversaries. This perpetuates a theology of hostility that Jesus came to dismantle.

Jesus' own words make this contrast strikingly clear. In Matthew 5:44, He says:

"But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

This teaching does not reinterpret Old Testament holy war—it replaces it. Where the Law once sanctioned vengeance, Jesus demands forgiveness. Where ancient Israel sought to destroy its enemies, the Kingdom of God seeks to redeem them. The Gospel introduces a new ethic that is not merely moral—it is transformational. Enemies are no longer to be defeated; they are to be loved.

Yet many churches, particularly in contexts of political or cultural conflict, continue to act as if Jesus never issued this command. They enter into culture wars, adopting language of battle and conquest—"taking back" nations, "fighting" moral decay, "defeating" secularism. While the church certainly has a prophetic role to play in confronting sin and injustice, the tone and posture of these efforts often mirror the spirit of conquest more than the heart of Christ. Outsiders are not seen as the mission field but as threats. Evangelism is eclipsed by activism. Mercy is replaced by militancy.

This failure to understand the Cross as the end of enmity results in a church that forgets both its calling and its identity. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:14–16:

"For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility… His purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity… and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility."

The dividing wall—between Jew and Gentile, insider and outsider, clean and unclean—was torn down by the Cross. The church is not a walled fortress defending its purity; it is a reconciled body, open to the world in love and grace. To persist in seeing the world through an Old Testament enemy framework is to rebuild what Christ has already destroyed. It is to live as though the Cross never happened.

There is no place in the New Covenant for a theology of hatred disguised as righteousness. The enemy is not the unbeliever, the immigrant, the progressive, the atheist, or even the religious hypocrite. The enemy is sin, division, violence,

and death—all of which Christ defeated through love, not force. When the church adopts the tools of warfare, it forfeits the tools of the Gospel.

To follow Christ is to love enemies, not label them; to bless, not curse; to speak peace into conflict, not incite further division. Only by abandoning the old frameworks of holy war and enemy logic can the church become what it was always meant to be: an embassy of reconciliation in a world still ruled by fear.

8. Recovering the Fulfillment: A Christ-Centered Church

If the modern church is to recover its true identity and mission, it must undertake a radical but essential return: a return to Christ at the center, not merely as the name above the door, but as the fulfiller of all that came before and the foundation of all that must follow. This recovery begins by re-reading all of Scripture—especially the Old Testament—not as a standalone text, but as a narrative pointing toward and completed in the risen Christ.

The Old Testament, as Jesus taught on the road to Emmaus, was never an end in itself. It was always prophetic, preparatory, and partial. Its stories, laws, rituals, and prophecies were designed to build expectation, to awaken longing, and to set the stage for God's climactic self-revelation in the person of Jesus. To read it without Christ is to read a story without its ending, a law without its liberator, a temple without its true inhabitant.

Christ Himself teaches this interpretive key:

"Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself." (Luke 24:27)

Therefore, the path forward for the church is not to abandon the Old Testament, but to read it through the lens of fulfillment, where every law, every sacrifice, every battle, and every king becomes a shadow pointing to the substance that is Christ (Colossians 2:17). Only then can the church be freed from the errors of misapplied law, weaponized prophecy, and exclusionary identity.

This Christ-centered reading leads naturally to a Christ-centered faith—a faith anchored not in theological abstraction but in the teachings of Jesus Himself. The modern church, for all its doctrinal complexity, often suffers from a surprising absence: the words of Jesus are rarely the primary lens through which Scripture, ethics, or discipleship are understood. Sermons more often draw from Paul, or from Old Testament narratives, than from the direct words of Christ. But if Jesus is Lord, then His voice must be central.

It is in Jesus' teachings that we find the ethic of the Kingdom—a way of life that reverses the world's values and renounces the old order:

- *"Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are the peacemakers... Love your enemies... Do good to those who hate you..."* (Matthew 5–7)

This is not a passive ethic. It is the shape of the new creation, a life marked by humility, mercy, truth, and reconciliation. It is not governed by coercion or conformity, but by the transforming presence of the Spirit, forming Christ in His people. This is the Kingdom ethic that the church must recover—not only to align with its Savior, but to offer the world an alternative to the cycles of violence, pride, and division that dominate every age.

To recover Christ, the church must also renounce what He fulfilled. This means letting go of:

- Law-based righteousness, which seeks justification through rule-keeping rather than grace.
- Vengeance, whether theological, cultural, or political, which Christ replaced with the ministry of reconciliation.
- Exclusion, based on nationality, ethnicity, status, or ideology, which Christ tore down through His blood.

Each of these belongs to the Old Covenant, which has been made obsolete by the better covenant of Christ (Hebrews 8:13). To continue to preach them is to deny the Cross, which put to death the hostility that once separated humanity from God and from one another (Ephesians 2:16).

A Christ-centered church is not merely doctrinally correct—it is spiritually aligned with the life of its King. It proclaims what He proclaimed, loves whom He loved, and walks as He walked. It does not grasp for cultural power or prophetic certainty; it bears witness to the kingdom not of this world, through humility, hospitality, and hope.

This is not weakness—it is the power of God made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). It is not retreat—it is resistance to the world's patterns of domination, fear, and tribalism. It is not irrelevance—it is the only relevant alternative to the disintegration of meaning in the modern age.

To recover fulfillment is to remember: the temple is Christ, the law is grace, the enemy is reconciled, and the kingdom is near. The church, if it would be the church, must be built not on Moses, David, or Elijah—but on Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, who alone is the cornerstone.

9. Conclusion: The Church's Choice—Shadow or Substance?

At the heart of the modern church's crisis is not a lack of Scripture, tradition, or theological infrastructure. The church has doctrine. It has history. It has access to the whole canon of Scripture and centuries of Christian reflection. But what it often lacks is clarity of focus. What it lacks is a Christ-centered lens through which all of Scripture and all of church life must be interpreted, ordered, and lived. The crisis is not merely doctrinal—it is existential. It is not about disagreement over secondary issues. It is Christ misunderstood.

Jesus did not come to contribute to the long line of Israel's prophets or to offer commentary on the Law. He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets—to embody what had only been foreshadowed. He is the substance to which all the shadows pointed. The sacrifices pointed to His Cross. The temple pointed to His body. The priesthood pointed to His mediation. The covenant pointed to His blood. The kingdom pointed to His reign. And yet, many churches continue to anchor themselves in the outlines rather than the reality. They preach Christ while

practicing Moses, profess grace while enforcing law, proclaim love while preserving structures of division.

This must change—not merely for theological precision, but for spiritual survival.

Today, the church faces a fundamental choice: Will it live in the shadow of the Old Covenant, or in the light of the New? Will it return to systems of exclusion, violence, ritual, and law—or will it enter the fullness of Christ's kingdom marked by mercy, peace, and Spirit-led freedom?

This is not a call to abandon the Old Testament or to reject the roots of the faith. Rather, it is a call to understand the Old Testament rightly—as a divinely orchestrated preparation for the one to come. It is a call to see the Law not as a rulebook for Christians, but as a tutor that leads us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). It is a call to stop mistaking the scaffolding for the building, the map for the destination, the type for the reality.

What the church needs is not a structural reformation—not new buildings, better branding, or revised creeds. What it needs is a spiritual reformation of focus: a turning of the eyes, hearts, pulpits, and communities toward Jesus alone. Every text, every sermon, every theological system must bend toward Him or be discarded. Every ministry that does not echo His ethic—humility, grace, peace, and reconciliation—must be reexamined. Every tradition that obscures rather than reveals the living Christ must be set aside.

For in Him all things hold together. In Him we see the fullness of God. In Him, the curtain is torn, the law is fulfilled, and the invitation is opened to all.

The church does not need to guess at its future. It needs only to recover its center. And its center is not an institution, a document, a culture, or a cause. Its center is Christ crucified and risen, the final Word of God, the light of the world, and the only foundation that will endure.

The time for confusion has passed. The time for compromise is over. The choice remains: shadow or substance, old or new, law or grace, temple or body, fear or love.

And the voice of Jesus still calls—*"Follow Me."*

References

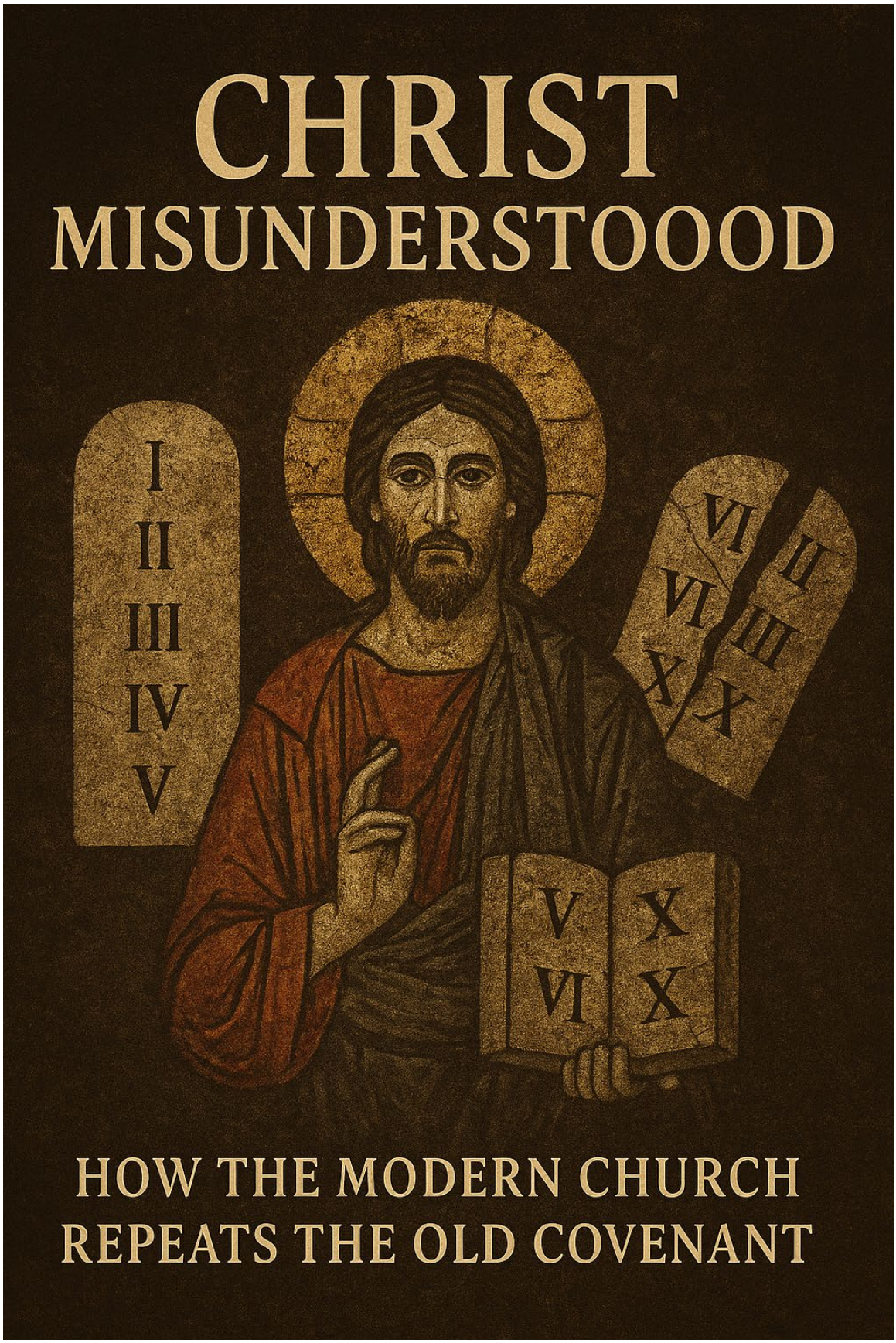
Scripture References (English Standard Version unless otherwise noted):

- Colossians 2:17 – “These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.”
- Hebrews 10:1 – “For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities…”
- Matthew 5:17 – “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”
- John 1:17 – “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”
- Matthew 5:38–44 – Jesus contrasts the Law with the ethic of the Kingdom, commanding love for enemies.
- John 2:19–21 – “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”
- Hebrews 9–10 – Christ as the once-for-all sacrifice and High Priest.
- Galatians 3:24–25 – “The law was our guardian until Christ came… now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.”
- Matthew 23:4, 23 – Jesus rebukes religious legalism and hypocritical righteousness.
- Matthew 11:28–30 – “Come to Me, all who labor… I will give you rest.”
- John 18:36 – “My kingdom is not of this world.”
- Ephesians 2:14–16 – Christ as our peace, breaking down the dividing wall of hostility.
- Luke 24:27 – “Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained… what was said… concerning Himself.”
- 1 Corinthians 3:16 – “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”

- Acts 1:7 – “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”
- 2 Corinthians 1:20 – “For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him.”
- 2 Corinthians 12:9 – “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”
- Hebrews 8:13 – “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete.”
- Galatians 3:28 – “There is neither Jew nor Greek… for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Other Sources (for context and contrast):

- Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* – early articulation of Christian just war theory.
- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 40 – further development of just war criteria.
- Dallas Theological Seminary. *Dispensationalism and Israel.* – Representative of modern dispensational views on Israel and prophecy.
- N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress Press, 1996) – Contemporary biblical scholarship emphasizing Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel’s story.
- Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (HarperOne, 1996) – Insightful critique of violence and legalism in Christian ethics.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